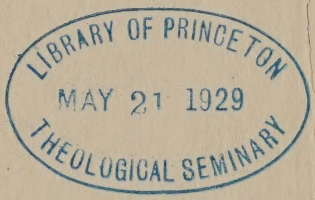
THE CHALLENGING CHRIST

JOHN BRITTAN CLARK



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The challenging Christ

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The Challenging Christ

SIX QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT JESUS

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To My Two
I. W. C.
I. A. W.

THE CHALLENGING CHRIST—Challenging us to make greatest in our lives what was greatest in His.

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I

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST DEED?

THE greatest deed of Christ—which and what was it? We have the record of two-and-a-half, possibly three, years of His peerless life, concerning which John tells us, "there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

When all are so great, so unexampled, so beautiful, so marvellous, which was His greatest deed?

There was, for example, the man born blind, who one day felt his way stumblingly to Christ. Other blind men there were in Palestine, who had been born with sight, but who had become blind through accident, or disease, or neglect. These carried with them into the darkness, that fell upon them like an extinguishing curtain, lasting memories of the beauty of the sea, the glory of the hills, the splendour of the sky, the look of the great city or little hamlet. On their memory's canvas was ever some loved face. As they went groping

along through the darkness of the years, memory would flash precious pictures on their consciousness, to brighten their night and cheer their gloom.

But this man had been *born* blind. He heard voices which must be always faceless for him. From the hills and from the sea came breezes which could have for him only imagined birthplaces. He lived, always, in a world of second-hand description—a world he had never seen.

Then dawned that dreamed of, but scarce expected day when Jesus met him. There is no darkness which the Light of the World cannot penetrate; it penetrated and dispelled this man's darkness. Suddenly, voices had faces; sensations had bodies. He looked into the beaming features of his loved ones. He clasped his little girl to his heart, devouring with eyes, that saw for the first time, the face he had often kissed and wondered over, in his hours of darkness. Was the giving of sight to this man Christ's greatest deed? People thought so, at the time. "Since the world began," they said, wonderingly, "was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." Wonderful, unparalleled it certainly was; but it was not Christ's greatest deed.

The healing of the leper was equally great. "Unclean, unclean," he cried in hoarse and awful

tones, and the people fled before him. Some reached for stones with which to stone him. If he approached within six feet of them, they, too, became unclean. Even the street, through which the poor wretch limped in his filth and rags, was not to be entered by any one who would remain clean. "Unclean, unclean!" The cry fell upon their ears, that memorable morning long ago, and the old scene repeats itself—curses, stones, fleeing people. Through them all the leper comes, bruised and bleeding, to Christ.

Will Christ curse him and bid him begone? No; it seems not. He waits for the leper to reach Him, and then looks compassionately into that awful face of living death. Christ—see the amazed people, from a safe distance, watching!—lays His hand on that scaly, cold, dead flesh. The pallid skin flushes, as it long ago had ceased to do, as the pure blood courses, again, through its long-forgotten channels. The dull, glazed eyes clear, as a window does, from its hoar frost. The pitiful bent form, crouching as if always expecting blows, straightens. The scars on the face disappear. The swollen, knotted fingers are rendered smooth and supple once again.

A moment of painful silence, broken only by the thud of dropped stones falling in the road; a moment of amazed surprise. Then, like a ray of

sunlight breaking through the clouds, sweeps over lake or field, there sweeps over the face of the leper the consciousness that he is healed. "Clean, clean!" Hear it ring from his exultant lips, and echo on the air—"Clean, clean!"

Was that Christ's greatest deed? They thought so, then, for the healing of a leper was held to be impossible. But they were wrong—that was not Christ's greatest deed.

Which was Christ's greatest deed? Ask that mother, sitting with her manly young son, in the trim little cottage at Nain. She will look at you, wondering why you ask the question. Then, she will turn toward her boy with a quiet smile, that evidences there being no doubt in *her* mind. He is her only child. Perhaps she will rise, glide softly to his side as he works at his task, and laying her hand in loving caress on the thick, dark hair, murmur, as she kisses it fondly: "He met me, as I followed my boy's body to its grave. He gave him back to me, not dead, but all aglow with life and love. This was the greatest thing Christ ever did." But she was mistaken.

Over there in Bethany, are two sisters, Martha and Mary. These two women will tell you that the greatest thing Christ ever did, was to raise their brother from the dead, after he had *been* dead, four days. They, too, were wrong. That

was the greatest thing Christ did for them, possibly, but not the chiefest deed of all.

"Ah," you say, "I have it. The greatest deed of Christ was, the surrender of His life on Calvary, for the redemption of the world. That was, indeed, the supremest deed ever done by man. Other men have died to save their fellows; but the measureless significance of that death on Calvary was its mysterious, effective connection with humanity in all its relations with life and God, make it, easily, the supremest deed ever wrought by man. Before it, we all bow most reverently, most adoringly, in worship and deepest gratitude. But—I say it hesitatingly, fearing lest, for the moment, it should startle and shock —even *that*, was not Christ's greatest deed.

Is there, then, a greater deed of Christ? Is there one lily fairer than all other lilies? Is there one song, sweeter than all other songs? Is there one star trailing its eclipsing splendour, over all other stars?

Yes; there *is* one song sweeter than all other songs—that which suddenly broke the stillness of that silent, December night, long ago, and floated out upon the hearing of the shepherds—the song of angels singing for men! There *is* one star, surpassing all others in splendour, making every successive year since it first flashed upon human

vision, radiant with its glory—the Star of Bethlehem. Yet all these—the resplendent heavens, the flaming star, the singing angels, the manger filled with hay, the cattle sharing their manger with the Holy Babe, the Wise Men, bearing gifts from Eastern treasuries—do but enframe the greatest deed of Christ. The greatest deed of Christ was His coming to earth, His assumption of human nature, His entrance upon the low level of men, who toil, and suffer, and die.

"But," you are thinking, "can the birth of any one be called his act, his deed? No, not in any instance but Christ's. His was not a usual birth. According to the Bible, His birth in human form, was a thing of His own volition. The astute mind and inspired soul of Paul realized this, and to the Philippians he wrote: "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but *made himself* of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Let me paraphrase this passage to bring out fully its meaning, without doing violence to the words themselves: "Christ Jesus, who, being inherently of the essence of God, thought this

equality of nature with God which He had in the other life, not a thing to be eagerly clutched and held to, but emptying Himself of it, assumed, instead, the nature and place of a bondslave, living the life of a man among men in the world, in order to win mankind to God."

That was Christ's greatest deed, and the greatness of it lies in its voluntariness. It was not under compulsion that Christ came into the world. Were this so, its distinctive greatness would be lost to us. Christ came of His own free will.

That Christ voluntarily lived His earthly life, is revealed in what He, Himself, once said about it to His disciples: "No man," He declared, "taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

Everything else, in the wonderful life of Christ, came from this voluntary taking upon Himself the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man—just as branches and leaves, blossoms and fruit, no matter how beautiful and rich, all come from the deep-buried root. Even the death of Christ, immeasurable as it is, in its spiritual grandeur and meaning, is a fruit of His fundamental decision not to hold on to His equality with God, but to be found in the likeness of sinful man.

Are not the decisions of life, always its truly great things? The voyage across uncharted seas, overcoming countless difficulties and privations; the mutiny of his crew, threatening not only his life, but his honour; the agony arising from the bitter conflict of his conviction with its seeming contradictions—all these were incidental and inferior to the decision of Christopher Columbus to find the New World. That decision was the greatest deed of the great Italian's life.

The story of Martin Luther is tremendously arresting—the nailing of his theses to the doorpost of the church in Wittenburg; his bold defiance of Tietzel's doctrine of indulgences; his stand at the Diet of Worms; his fearless warfare with the Pope. But all these come from just one thing—his decision to stand upon the sole authority of the Scriptures, as being higher than Pope or Council. Incidental to, and coming from, that decision, was all else, in the world-transforming life of the famous monk of Erfut.

Yes; decisions are the greatest thing in life. Is there any outstanding human deed, of which it is not true to say, that the decision which begot it—almost always arrived at, in agony of soul and with bloody sweat—is greater than the deed itself? One can never be greater than his greatest decision. That determines that to which he can

rise, just as the hermetically sealed tube of the thermometer, limits the height to which the mercury in it can rise.

Let me try to illustrate: One wants, say, to own a certain piece of property. When he trys to buy it, he finds it to be part of a tract of land which cannot be subdivided. So he has to buy the whole tract, in order to get the particular piece he wants. Thus, having first decided to buy what he wanted, he has to make a larger decision, which included the smaller.

Again: A man decides to take a certain course of study. He proceeds to take it, but his health fails, and he finds himself unable to do as he planned. He has to stop, and set about getting built up physically. Then he goes on with his studies. He had to make the larger decision—that concerned with his health—before he could carry out his smaller decision. The larger, included the smaller.

Now, apply this principle to spiritual living: There is some single questionable habit or practice one realizes he should discontinue. He decides to give it up. But, to his mortification and surprise, he finds he cannot give it up, by merely deciding to do so. That evil thing in his life is connected with, and is the outcome of, something bigger than itself. Its root lies in the man's gen-

eral attitude toward *all* wrong. He must make a decision concerning wrong as a whole before he can carry out his decision against wrong, in particular. He must lay the axe to the root of the tree.

This is equally true on its positive side. One wants some good thing—patience, moral strength, self-mastery. But one cannot reach out and gather these qualities as he would some choice apples from a tree. These, too, are discovered to be related things; they are connected with, and are the fruit of, a general attitude toward life. It is not sufficient to decide to possess that particular estimable quality. There must be a bigger decision than that, one which includes the smaller decision. One must resolve to be a Christian, through-and-through. One cannot serve God and mammon.

This puts one's spiritual life on a big and sound basis. It halts the fuming and fussing with detached bad or good things. Is there any slavery comparable with everlastingly trying to do, or not to do, this or that? The thing to do is, once and for all to commit one's self to that which will automatically exclude what conflicts with it, and automatically include what co-operates with it. This will do away with that mystifying and humiliating thing—repeated sin.

The greatest thing in Christ's life was the de-

cision which included everything else—the decision to give up what He really had, and was, and to live and die for the spiritual welfare of mankind.

That is the decision every one who follows Christ must make; and, the making of it, is any one's greatest deed. The fine, big thing to do is what Christ did—decide not to live for self, but for the spiritual ideal in one's own soul and in the souls of other people; then, not triflingly but genuinely, to keep that life-decision unfalteringly before one. It is amazing how big that can make the Christian life! Instead of a side-issue, it becomes the one main thing, dignifying all else by its inspiring greatness. It is surprising to discover the way in which things, which used to trip and hamper one, cease to interfere. It is simply wonderful, the way one comes to possess increasing freedom and mounting power—just as an apprentice, working assiduously at his chosen calling, comes to have a deep, rich pride in mastering it.

Yes; that is the thing to do—to make the one great life-decision, which will shape the entire range and control of everything else. You will find bad things, you could neither understand nor get rid of, dropping out; you will find new and wonderful things taking their places, to the permanent enrichment of the whole man.

The springtime furnishes a striking illustration of this process. On many trees dead leaves, which have defied every endeavour to tear them off, still remain. The rain has lashed them, the winds have pulled at them, but still they cling—poor, dead, useless things! But, look for these dry leaves a little later; not one will be left upon the trees! The new sap, slowly mounting into every branch and twig, has pushed them off. In their places are the new, tender leaves, actually bursting with fulness of life.

Making the great decision for Christ operates in the same way. It starts a new life coursing through the soul, pushing off all those evil things which the most earnest effort had failed to dislodge. It will make life beautiful with the new tendencies it causes to bud. Stop, here and now, that discouraging, everlasting picking at yourself, in order to get rid of bad things. Stop fastening on your life this or that good thing, knowing, all the while, they are spurious fruits. Make the great decision. It will be the transcendent deed of your life, as it was Christ's.

In one of the cemeteries of Europe there is a headstone carrying this legend: "Here lies an old man, aged seven years." Inquiry developed that the man buried beneath it had died at the age of ninety-five, but had given himself to Christ just

seven years before his death. He counted as his life, only the years he had known and followed his Lord. Was he not right? Did not Christ say, "Ye must be born again"?

How old are *you*—today?

II

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST THOUGHT?

IT is possible to select from all the known rich mines of gold one which pays its owners the most; but who can tell where the richest deposit of hidden gold lies in the bosom of the old earth, still unwrested from her jealous arms? Who would dare to hazard an appraisement of its value, though he knew where to find it?

One can select the song which pleases him most, the picture to which he personally most responds; but who can say which is the greatest musical composition, the greatest picture in the world?

So one feels as he asks, what was Christ's supreme thought? Our only knowledge of Christ's thinking is the record of it as given by His biographers, transcribed from memory only, years after His corporeal presence had been withdrawn. Each of these biographers recorded some of their Master's thoughts—things they heard Him say

to the crowds, things He said to them, alone—and each gives something the others do *not* give; something said to him personally, or something which particularly impressed him. We have, thus, a mass of Christ's thoughts into which we can dip, as into a casket of jewels, letting them run, as it were, shiningly through our fingers, concentrating, for a moment, on this or that, with special notice and admiration. But which is the most wonderful of them all?

Here, for instance, is Christ's new thought of God. It was launched into the world of His day, amid the many and conflicting thoughts of God, as Noah's dove was launched from the ark, on to the stormy waters about it. People believed in the existence of God. They believed in human responsibility to Him. They believed in the holiness of God, and His hostility to sin. They believed the supreme effort of man should be to get right with God. That is why, all over the world, altars were smoking with sacrifice. Their smoke curled up ceaselessly into the blue sky of Italy. It drifted, continually, over the flowers and marbles of Greece. It rose, like the Pillar of Cloud, from the temple in Jerusalem. To these altars men were bringing, day after day, something to placate an angry God—a turtle dove, a lamb, the

firstfruits and, in some parts of the world, their own firstborn.

Into this tumult of thought concerning God, Christ launched His fresh conception—a God, not angry, but tenderly loving sinful mankind; a God seeking the straying, as a shepherd his lost sheep; a God, not requiring man to sacrifice to Him, but making sacrifice for man.

Christ's marvellous story of the Prodigal illustrates His master-thought of God. What a vivid picture it is! One visualizes it clearly, and without difficulty:—the stately home of the wealthy father in the still early morning; the younger son, clad in his best, with scrip at his girdle, filled with his share of the parental wealth, gaily waving farewell to the sad, white-haired old man in the doorway, who sees with breaking heart, as countless sires have seen, his boy turning his back upon home and father, to face the unknown world —alone!

Then, another picture: We are in a distant banqueting-hall. There is "the sound of revelry by night." The lights are blazing; the air is heavy with the redolence of flowers and wine. Women, beautiful and dissipated, are there, laughing, singing, dancing, in drunken abandon. Men, spendthrift and reckless, are boisterously carousing. One of them is this wilful young

fellow, from the faraway home. His eyes are bright, his cheeks flushed with wine. He is the gayest of the gay, the leader in the wild, godless rout.

Then—another quick shift of scene: There come into view the bare, filthy swine-pens. A young man, naked, save for a loin-cloth, heavy dark circles under his haggard eyes, face pale and drawn, limbs trembling with weakness and unstrung nerves. Faint from hunger, wet with the dews of the night, he is reaching into the troughs for food of the swine!

Once more the picture changes: We see a winding road. Along it, in the glory of late afternoon, comes this young swineherd. He is painfully limping, his stumbling feet raising the dust in clouds. Tinged by the glory of the westering sun, it seems like the ghost of his vanished gold. There, away down the road, is his boyhood home. Faint with exhaustion, he leans against a stone wall. The dogs recognize him, and greet him with the changeless love of the loyal canine heart. But see! Who is it that stands in yonder doorway, watching, as if he had never left it since his boy went away? Tremblingly the boy draws near, leaning upon his ragged staff. Then—his father's arms are round him; his father's kisses stifle his broken, halting confession; his father

leads him tenderly to his place in the old home. "My son, my son! Welcome home! My son, my son!"

Was ever story like unto this? Was ever story more deeply cherished in the heart of mankind? The father, in that parable, embodies Christ's thought of God. The father, not the prodigal, as generally conceived, is the hero of that story. What a thought of God to give to a world filled with the merely judicial conception of God and man's guilty relation to his Maker; to give human life striving in agony to placate an angry punitive God! This new thought—God loving man in all sin, as this father loved his wayward boy; God reconciling man unto Himself instead of man reconciling God, asking no sacrifice of the sinner but making sacrifice Himself—is one of the greatest thoughts ever given to the world. But was it Christ's supreme thought? I think not.

Again: One day, Christ told the listening multitude that wondrous story of the two houses built, one on the sand, the other on a rock. The listening crowd visualized these two houses. The sun shone, the birds sang, and the two houses stood in all their completeness, not far apart.

Then, with few strokes but with a wondrous dramatic touch, Christ made the heavens to darken. Great black clouds rise on the horizon

and rush across the sky, like dark frowns across a smiling face. The gentle zephyrs become howling blasts. The sand whirls in stinging sheets through the storm-charged air. Branches of trees are torn away. There is crash upon crash of thunder, flash after flash of lightning, then—an awful wrenching, grinding sound.

It is all over, in a moment or two, and the returning light discovers a changed scene. On the sodden, half-deluged sand lies a confused mass of wreckage. Near it, straight, sound, with the sunlight playing on its white walls, stands the house on the rock, alone.

Thus Christ, in one of His marvellous word-pictures, enframes for all time this great thought —life, in order to withstand the many varied and fierce storms which beat about it, must depend upon something other than mere show, appearance, or ornament. It must grip eternal truth, and hold on to it, though the heavens fall.

When we properly recall that Christ lived in a time, and among a people, where, as now, form, profession, show and hypocrisy, passed for the real thing, we can appreciate what a strong, novel, daring utterance this of Christ's was. It was a tremendous thought, to give to a hollow, superficial age, this thought of how the strength of life is found in a strong grip on eternal reality.

But, was it Christ's supreme thought. I do not think so.

The Apostle John tells us how, on the last great day of the feast, when Jerusalem was thronged with people from distant parts of the then known world; when the courts of the Temple were crowded with devout worshippers; when the sacrifices were being offered in ceaseless succession, filling the whole Temple atmosphere with the fumes of burning flesh and incense; when the priests, in gorgeously embroidered robes and jewelled tiaras were passing to and fro, Christ, the Highest Priest of all, in His seamless homespun coat, with no censer save His heart, throbbing with yearning love for all, cried aloud: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

What a recognition of the deep, unsatisfied thirst of the human soul, and the yearning universal search for satisfaction! Was it great? So thought those who heard Christ utter it. Even those sent to arrest Him went back empty handed, saying to those who sent them, "Never man spake like this man." Oh, it was indeed wonderful, Christ's thought of the soul-thirst of mankind, and He, its water of life. But was that Christ's supreme thought? I think not.

What, then, *was* His supreme thought? To be supreme, it must needs be all-embracing, some-

thing including and surpassing all other thoughts. Music is all-embracing; it is greater than, yet inclusive of, all its varied expressions. Art is all-embracing, greater than any picture, or statue, or cathedral. The supreme, the all-embracing thought of Christ, which includes all His separate great thoughts as air holds the innumerable singing-birds, is this—that the spiritual is the greatest reality; that in reference and relation to man, the inner, spiritual self is the real self.

Jesus came into the world, holding this one supreme appraisement of mankind. He never lost it, as many of us do, temporarily or permanently. In times when crucial experience tears to pieces every error, just as the agony of the world at Christ's death tore the veil from before the Holy of Holies, we see again through the rent curtain that the spiritual is the only great reality, the only real gauge of life. But often, in the press of living, we lose this viewpoint. Christ *never once* lost it; the consciousness that the spiritual self is the real self was His—always. This is why He did not turn away the woman who was a sinner when, in the house of Simon, she pressed her lips to His feet, which she bathed with her tears. The Pharisee, whose guest Christ was, spurned the woman because he did what people usually do—made her outward seeming the gauge of her.

Jesus appraised her by her spiritual attitude. He received and blessed her, because her spiritual self was, to Him, the real woman.

Do you recall what it was Jesus said to Zaccheus, when He saw that chief of the publicans reviled and rejected by the Jews? "He, also," said Christ, "is a son of Abraham." Nothing seemed more preposterously impossible to those proud Jews, who openly rated a dog as being above a publican. To them, Zaccheus was only what he was outwardly. To Christ, Zaccheus was what he was spiritually—a man seeking to see and know, eager to entertain divine truth.

With a courage never surpassed, and, in view of the personal and eternal issues at stake, never equalled, Christ said to the Pharisees, who held His fate in their hands: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*"

Thus Jesus publicly proclaimed His supreme thought, that not the outward, material man, but the inner, spiritual man is *the* man. Like polished spears in the hands of Æneas, like shafts in the grasp of Ulysses, these two words, "outward" and "inward," gleam and flash in Christ's thought and teaching. Always the supreme thought—the

thought which to Christ was the atmosphere in which He lived—was, that the inward, the spiritual, with its attitude, purpose and implication, is the real self.

And the spiritual did not mean to Christ what it means, unfortunately, to many. Being pious, particular about religious statements and ecclesiastical practices—all these are, of course, important, and I, for one, would not belittle them. But being spiritual meant to Christ being conscious one was a spirit, a part of the Supreme Spirit—God.

This supreme thought of Christ, like all great thought, amounts to little, save as it is given tangibility. What value has music, save as it becomes audible in *The Messiah,* or *The Creation,* or the *Moonlight Sonata?* What value has art, save as it takes form in Angelo's *Moses* or Raphael's *Madonnas* or Millet's *Angelus?* What value has architecture, save as it is expressed in a Cologne Cathedral, or that wondrous lace-like fabric, the Cathedral at Milan? So, what value has Christ's supreme thought that the only real self is the spirit-self, unless we make the spirit supreme in our personal living? Unless, instead of allowing fear and worry, burdens and problems, nerves and temperament to control us, we see to it that the spirit, which is really "we," controls them? Un-

less, instead of being controlled by our evil thought, and feeling, and habit, the spirit, that is really "we," controls these? That was one of the great secrets of Christ's own life—of that I am sure. That was the wondrous revelation He gave, and which transformed life for those who gripped it—they who had been slaves became masters. That was the meaning of Paul's words: "If the Christ shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." What is the New Birth other than one's becoming actually aware that he is a spirit, and, as such, being in control of the little world of his personal life, as the Supreme Spirit is in control of the great material universe?

This is the paramount thought of Christ—the reality, the supremacy of the spirit—and how inspiring, how wonderful, how transforming a thought it is!

Once revealed to us, we cannot escape the conviction of its truth, nor its magnificent challenge. It wins from us the desire, and gives birth within us, to the determination to be what we were meant to be, and may be by the grace of God. Jack Appleton puts it tellingly in his interesting lines:

"I knew his face the moment that he passed
Triumphant in the thoughtless, cruel throng,—
Triumphant, though the quiet tired eyes
Showed that his soul had suffered overlong,

And though, across his brow, faint lines of care
Were etched, somewhat of Youth still lingered there.
I gently touched his arm—he smiled at me—
He was the Man that Once I Meant to Be.

* * * * * *

"We did not speak. But in his sapient eyes
I saw the spirit that had urged him on,
The courage that had held him through the fight
Had once been mine; I thought, 'Can it be gone?'
He felt that unasked question—felt it so
His pale lips formed the one word answer, 'No.'

* * * * * *

"Too late to win? No! Not too late for me—
He is the Man that still I mean to be."

III

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST WORD?

RAYS of light, passing through a lens, concentrate at one point, and that point, we call its focus. Similarly the varied elements of a man's personality, passing through the powerful lens of daily living, converge in some word which indicates his life's purpose and aim. For Napoleon, this word was conquest, for Socrates, it was philosophy, for Darwin, science, for Washington, America, for Mussolini, Italy.

What was Christ's greatest word? The New Testament reveals Him as the never-failing healer, the Great Physician. Let us follow Him into two of the humble homes He entered, and see if, there, we do not hear His greatest word.

In a little house in Capernaum, by the sea, Peter's wife's mother lies ill. Her fever mounts daily, despite all her relatives can do. They have brought her cool fruits from the little garden; they have given her chilled wine and milk. Peter saves for her the choicest of his catch. Nothing helps. One day, Christ comes to Capernaum, and

Peter tells Him. Leaving the shore, they follow the narrow street leading to Peter's home. Into the quiet house Christ goes. He enters the darkened room, its open window curtained by the green vines, moves over to the soft mats on which the sick woman is moaning in her delirium. His cool, strong, controlling hand is laid upon the hot, aching head. The moaning stops; the eyes open, and gaze smilingly, sanely, into His; the flush passes away; the fever is gone. Though weak, the woman is well. Was Christ's greatest word, "health"?

Again: Jesus is teaching in one of those humble homes. There is one room, only, its single opening the door through which the sun shines on the dark, dirt floor, in a great sheet of golden light. Otherwise, the room is dark and crowded. Through the dimness, one sees eager faces with eyes fastened upon Christ. Outside, around the house and blocking the door, is a great mass of people unable to gain admittance to the house.

Suddenly, over Christ's head, a ripping sound is heard; a piece of the thatched roof is torn away; a shaft of light shoots down to where Christ sits. Then, through the opening, a man on a mat supported by ropes, is lowered down to the very feet of Christ.

What a picture it makes—the sudden dawn in

that dark room's night; the surprised faces of the people; the opening above, edged with eager faces looking down; the sagging ropes; the poor palsied wretch on his mat, his limbs shaking like leaves in a wind, his yearning eyes with hope dawning in them; and—Christ, flooded with light.

A few words spoken by Jesus and the man is on his feet, quiet, strong, his trembling gone, his mat rolled under his arm, his face aglow with a wonderful light. He strides to the door and through the crowd, that, awe-stricken, fall away to let him pass. Was not Christ's greatest word, health?

And still, through the ages, as the centuries come and go

> *"The healing of His seamless dress*
> *Is by our beds of pain;*
> *We touch Him in life's throng and press,*
> *And we are whole again."*

Nevertheless, Christ's greatest word was *not* "health."

Was Christ's greatest word "law"? He came, so He Himself said, to fulfil the law. Law had been Moses' greatest word, without doubt, and history rightly calls Moses the great law-giver. It has been declared that the whole body of modern

law can be traced back to the Mosaic code. Be that true or not, the Bible shows plainly that the entire national life of the Hebrews was controlled by law. Every act of every Hebrew's personal day was controlled by some law. Christ was a Hebrew. From His earliest days He had been taught the law of Moses, first by His mother in the little Nazareth cottage, later, by some old wrinkled rabbi in the sombre synagogue school. The Mosaic law should, in the conception of its teachers, have been Christ's greatest concern; His greatest word should have been "law." That it was not, amazed, grieved and embittered the rulers. They determined to show Him to the people as a man who disregarded and belittled the law.

They come before Him wherever He had the crowd—sometimes in a house, sometimes in the Temple, sometimes on the road. They press up to the front where all can see them, garbed in their white gowns with broad border, and the phylactery —a little leathern box holding a sentence from the Mosaic law—fastened by a broad band around their foreheads. Hatred is in their dark eyes, an ill-concealed sneer on their wrinkled faces. They glance suggestively at the crowd ready to explode into riotous madness at any insult to the Mosaic law. They ask Him, "Master"—what bitter

irony in that title given by them to an ignorant peasant!—"Moses, in the law, said . . . what sayest thou?"

One day, they put forth a man trained in all the quibbles and intricacies of their system. He was very shrewd. He knew better than to ask Christ about any one law, for teachers differed in interpretation. He would not commit himself, but he tried to get a direct commitment from Christ. "Master," he asked, "which is the great commandment of the law?" He gets his answer, quick, clear, unmistakable:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment."

That was all the man had asked, but he got more:

"And the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Well, then; did not Christ make law supreme? No; He said law was subject to love. Can that which is subject, be greater than that which is paramount? Law was *not* Christ's greatest word.

To say this, will not meet with the approval of those who believe law to be the only cure for social evils. Law, law-making, law-enforcement,

and law-observance; but always the same thing—law. Are not we all under physical law? Are not we all under phychic law? Have the Ten Commandments ever been revoked? Is not law Christ's greatest word? I do not think so.

Was it love? One might well so infer, from Christ's summary of the law as love—love for God and man. Christ, Himself, was the incarnation of love. Love was as native to Jesus as perfume to a flower, as oxygen to air. The two greatest interpreters of Christ were John and Paul. Was John wrong when he said, "God is love?" Was Paul wrong when, in that marvellous thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, he said, "*Now abideth faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love*"? Doubtless Paul and John conceived of love as being the greatest word; but we are not seeking the greatest word of these men. We are seeking Christ's. I am sure it was not love, even in the face of the great declaration, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yes, despite even that, Christ's greatest word was not love. "But," you say, "how about Christ's 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' and the outstanding fact that Christ laid down His life

for His enemies? Even in face of *that,* Christ's greatest word was not love.

Was it faith? Christ laid the greatest possible emphasis on faith. Faith was always the vestibule through which His healings were made to pass. He went, one day, to His own city of Nazareth, which, like every other place, had its dire need of Him. There were parents in Nazareth with little sick children; there were blind and lame and fevered and leprous men in Nazareth. Yet very few of them were healed. Matthew says, "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Christ had to have faith as His coadjutor. Repeatedly, when asked to help, He asked, "Believest thou I am able to do this?" Faith was always on Christ's lips; it was one of His great words, but it was not His greatest word. "And you say that," you ask, "despite the famous eleventh chapter of Hebrews—'The Westminster Abbey of the Bible,' some one has called it—wherein are the memorials of Hebrews, and others, conspicuous for their faith?" Yes, even despite that wondrous glorification of faith, it was not Christ's greatest word.

Not health, not law, not love, not faith—what remains? Was it salvation? Surely that must be it, because of His peculiar title—"Saviour." To realize its implication was His designated mis-

sion to the world. "*Thou shalt call his name* JESUS, *for he shall save his people from their sins.*" Here is an outcast, his only distinction his shame: Can there be any greater word for him than "salvation"? Here is one in the grip of a killing sin, killing not only him, but those associated with him: Can there be for him, or them, any greater word than "salvation"? How can there be any greater word for Christ, even, than "Saviour," "salvation," "saved"?

But there *is* a greater. Christ's greatest word was—life. Without life, what meaning has health, or law, or love, or faith, or salvation? What is there to heal, or govern, or love, or save? Life includes all these and the whole is ever greater than any of its parts. Christ said of Himself, "*I am the life.*" Christ said of Himself, "*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*" The word translated "abundantly" means overflowingly. It suggests a spring bubbling up in its basin, filling it, running over its edge. Christ said, "*I am the water of life.*" Christ said, "*I am the bread of life.*" Bread—water—why, these are the vital foci of life everywhere. Christ said He was both.

Whatever their first thought, His disciples came, afterwards, to feel that Christ's greatest word was

life. Let me quote a few only of their sayings concerning their belief: "*In him was life, and the life was the light of men;*" "*To whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life;*" "*Believing, ye might have life through his name;*" "*Eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord;*" "*The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death;*" "*When Christ our life shall appear,*" and that wonderful title Peter gave Christ before the rulers —*The Prince of Life.*

String these on the cord of reverence—what a radiant necklace to fling around the neck of Christ! Radiant, gleaming, flashing life! Christ's greatest word was "life."

Just what did the word mean, on the lips of Christ? It could not have meant physical being, merely, for those to whom He spake had that. It could not have meant merely mental life, they had that, too. Nor was it religious life, for on this, these men were conspicuously strong.

Life, for Christ, meant something much more and very different. Just as you and I know we are surrounded by a vast ocean of air, invisible though it be, so Christ knew us to be surrounded by a vast ocean of invisible divine life. This life is an actual thing—something upon which people may draw and take into themselves just as they

turn on a faucet, and draw water from a supply which they know to exist, although they may not know where it is, or anything further about it.

What Christ did when He healed people, physically or spiritually, was to open the way to this life, for the lack of which, they were suffering. I take that to be the meaning of this great word—"*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*"

Christ demonstrated this in Himself. One day He came to Jacob's well and rested there. He was very weary, hungry and thirsty. His disciples went to a neighbouring village to obtain food, but when they returned, and offered it to Jesus, He said He did not need it. What had happened? "Has any given him to eat?" they asked, one of the other. They had left Him in great need of food; they returned to find Him refreshed and strengthened and sustained. Christ explained it to them. "I have meat to eat," He said, "that ye know not of."

What had happened was this: He had drawn into Himself and for His need, adequate supplies from the great invisible, but real reservoir of spiritual life.

I believe this is what Christ desires us to learn how to do. Everywhere He saw people—just as we see them, today—weary, worn, weak, wasted

in body, mind and soul. They did not know—He did—that there was actual life ready for them to take into their souls, just as one, almost dying, takes oxygen and lives. And He tried to show them how it was to be obtained.

I found a remarkable illustration of this, recently, in that wonderful little book, *The Christ of the Indian Road.* Its author, a missionary in India, had a striking experience. Let him tell it:

"Eight years of strain had brought on a nervous exhaustion, so that there were several collapses in India before I left on furlough. On board ship there was another collapse. I took a year's furlough in America. On my way back to India my old trouble came back. There were several collapses. I saw, unless I got help from somewhere, I would have to give up my missionary career. It was one of my darkest hours. At that time I was in a meeting in Lucknow. While in prayer, not particularly thinking about myself, a Voice seemed to say, 'Are you yourself ready for this work to which I have called you?' I replied, 'No, Lord, I am done for. I have reached the end of my rope.' The Voice replied, 'If you will turn that over to me and not worry about it, I will take care of it.' I quickly answered, 'Lord, I close the bargain right here.'

"A great peace settled into my heart and pervaded me. I knew it was done. Life—abundant life—had taken possession of me. I was so lifted up I scarcely touched the road as I quietly walked

home that night. Nine of the most strenuous years of my life have gone by since then, and the old trouble has never returned and I have never had such health. But it was more than a physical touch. *I seem to have tapped new life* for body and spirit. *And I had done nothing but take it.* I suppose this experience can be picked to pieces psychologically and explained. It does not matter. Life is bigger than processes and overflows them. *Christ to me had become life."*

I think that those of Christ's own day, to whom He gave life, had a similar experience. Is it not wonderful? Here is a great reservoir of actual life—a real thing—which needy mankind can tap, and receive therefrom a rich and full supply.

I feel, somehow, that we have lost grip of this wonderful truth by having always thought of Christ, when He spoke of eternal life, as meaning life after death. I am sure that He meant eternal life to be *here* and *now*—something for present utility as well as for future enjoyment. That is what Christ's disciples came to feel. "We *have* passed from death unto life," they said. This was one of the chief notes of "the good news," which thrilled the world of the first century, and which we appear to have lost.

Let us strive to get it, again. How life, Christ's greatest word, co-ordinates Him with our present! The quest, everywhere is for life. All science

is working for something to save, help, enrich, prolong life. For what are all social and industrial struggles? For better, fuller, richer life. Chemistry, surgery, medicine, education, research, hygiene, government—they are straining at every leash, which holds them back from life's betterment.

The one great, thrilling word of our time is "life." And "life" was Christ's greatest word. Tell people this and get them to accept the truth of it, and Christ takes on new meaning. They may have little or no interest in theologies, statements and dogmatic creeds; or, of what seem, to them, to be certain spiritual delicacies which are called peace, rest, joy, righteousness. But let men know that Christ, Himself, said that His mission was not merely to prepare men to die, but to *live;* to give life, and to give it ever more unfoldingly. Then they will say to you, "Ah, that is a different story. That, or something like it, is what we all are after—everywhere!"

Let us not think of this life-resource as applying to mankind generally; let us take it to ourselves, personally. We need to have this wonderful divine life poured into us, as one pours water from a pitcher into a glass. Let us think of life, as, I am sure, Christ thought of it—a pure, clear, beautiful, radiant reality, as real as water,

which can be poured into our dire need of it. We have strong religious beliefs—they need new, rich life poured into them. We have our divine ideals —they need life poured into them. We have latent powers in us—they need life poured into them. Are you, or are some dear to you, weak, discouraged, despairing, burdened with things numberless? Is personal religion in you, or in them, dead or dying? Are hopes, purposes, endeavours, all so fruitless? Are there opportunities for which you seemingly are inadequate? Empty—all along the line—empty! The pitchers—yourselves—are there but—empty.

Now, the wonderful thing is, Christ says the empty pitchers can be filled with actual life, just as though one filled a pitcher with water at a well; and we can pour this life into every need we have, just as we pour water into separate glasses. We can pour it into our illnesses and be well; into our fatigue and be rested; into our tasks and be equal to them; into our sorrow, "and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

How? As you do the air—by simply taking it; by saying to Christ, "I depend absolutely upon Thee. Give me life." Then, stopping all thinking and reasoning about it—you do not keep thinking and reasoning about breathing—go on, simply breathing. Go on *as having it,* and

it will keep coming in. You do not have to die to have and revel in eternal life. It is here *now* —take it.

Hold up your empty pitcher. Christ will pour into it eternal life—here and now!

IV

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST HOPE?

AMONG many pleasant recollections of college days one I have, which is especially memorable. Winter on the New England hills was very severe. The dark days, the ceaseless snow, the biting cold seemed endless. When the first days of coming light and warmth made winter really a thing of the past; when the delightful sunshine told us spring was actually near, we seized the first hours of freedom, and were off to the hills. What a joy it was to get far from town, along country roads, out past the old farms, or skirting the edges of the woods! Stirring up the fallen dead leaves with our feet, on some sunny open slope, we often found the mayflower buds, the fragrant arbutus. So small, so beautiful were they that they seemed like tiny, lovely pink pearls, flung by retreating winter, around the neck of spring.

Hope is the arbutus of life. Life may be marked with disappointment, with failure, with bitter experience, with exacting requirement, with

terrible sorrow; but, under all these—the dead leaves and débris of life—is beautiful hope. Despite what the past has been, what the present is, we keep searching under the leaves for something we feel sure is there, though we cannot actually see it, something to assure us of the spring. "Hope," some one has said, beautifully, "is faith, holding out its hands in the dark."

Christ's life had many bitter experiences, much hard toil, keen disappointments, severe hardships, intense agonies of soul. Christ's life is humanity's peerless tragedy. Nevertheless, hidden under all these, deep-buried from casual, superficial, glance, there bloomed in the soul of Jesus the sweet arbutus—a precious hope. What was it?

Of one thing, we may be sure. Christ's hope was for no material thing. Christ did not hope for wealth. Had He done so, imagination cannot estimate what His wealth would have been. He that multiplied loaves and fishes could have multiplied currency. And riches would have come in other ways, also. There was a certain ruler named Jairus, who had a little daughter. The small, graceful form dancing hither and thither; the long, soft hair, rippling in natural waviness from the fine smooth forehead; the deep, dark eyes filled with the ever-changing lights of fun, and joy, and grave thoughtfulness; the finely-

moulded cheeks, like delicate roses; the merry laugh from the rosy lips—can you not catch a glimpse of her across the intervening centuries? Can you not well understand, how she was her father's most precious possession? He would come home tired, burdened, gloomy. She would run to meet him, springing into his arms, pulling his beard, kissing his gloom away, piercing his cares with the gold-tipped spear of her laughter. But one awful day she died. He—well, all of us can imagine and some of us *know,* what that father felt. Life had suddenly become emptied for him. Then Christ came to his door, entering that darkened chamber and giving him back his lovely, laughing little girl. Was there anything Jairus would not have given Jesus?

One day there came to Christ another broken-hearted father. His boy, from whom he had expected so much, was not dead—but might better have been. He was a demoniac, rent, and torn, and played with, by a raging evil spirit. Oh, the humiliation, the shame, the disappointment, the bitter despair in that father's heart! See him standing there, looking down on that writhing, foaming thing he called his son, a great crowd of curious onlookers surrounding him. Then Christ came. He understood. He spoke, in that wonderful voice of spiritual command such as this

earth has heard from no other, and that father has, again, the fine boy that once had been his. He goes away with his son—straight, clear-eyed, sane, strong, as any lad in Israel. Was there anything that man had, which he would not, eagerly, have given Christ?

Had Christ hoped for wealth it would have rolled to His feet in golden waves, like the sun-burnished tide rolls in upon the shore.

Nor did Christ hope for power. Had power been His hope, could He not have realized it? More than once the excited crowds, enthused by His wonderful deeds, thrilled by His inspired words, lifted by His heavenly thoughts, almost thrust a sceptre into His hand, almost crushed a crown upon His head, almost threw a purple robe around His rough homespun. Christ might have had any throne He wished. Armies would have followed Him in swelling numbers, with a strength and enthusiasm equal to attaining of any goal He set. Did not Christ know this? Did He, Himself, not say that twelve legions of angel-warriors waited with flaming swords for His word of command?

Nor did Christ hope for personal ease and comfort. Who of us, hard pressed by ceaseless, inexorable, strenuous living, has not said: "There is just one thing for which I hope—some day to reach a place where I can escape all this." Our

great hope is for rest, for leisure in the which to do as we want, not as we must; for the joy of being our own master, not the slave of any number of things, entangling us more and more.

But this was not Christ's greatest hope. He had retirement and obscurity in Nazareth. No one outside that village knew He lived—or cared. He need not to have emerged from that quiet little hamlet into the wild maelstrom of jealousies and hates, of prejudices and established beliefs and practices, of pride and sin. Christ must have known what awaited Him when He left Nazareth, for the life outside. Yet He did not hold back. Whatever His hope, it certainly was not for rest or ease.

Of all the material hopes of men, there is not one which was really the hope of Christ. Let us turn, then, to the upper, the spiritual side, of life and see if we can discover there Christ's greatest hope.

A great spiritual hope of ours, is to be master of ourselves. We are so quick to lose self-control, to obey our hasty impulses, to gratify our passions, that, sometimes, we can think of nothing greater than complete self-mastery; the power to be always cool, wise, thoughtful, considerate, just, loving, right. Christ was never anything other than perfect master of Himself.

One day, weary, thirsty and hungry, Christ came with His disciples to a Samaritan village where, but yesterday, He had been enthusiastically received. But now—see them gather at their city's gate. They bar His entrance. They jeer in His face. "Jews have no dealing with Samaritans, you know," they mockingly cry. "You are going to Jerusalem? Well, go ahead. We shall not detain you," they tauntingly shout. "You shall not come in here."

This was too much for John. His eyes flash, his brown cheeks redden, his chest heaves with quick, angry breathing. He clenches his fist in the faces of those despised Samaritans, and turns to Christ, passionately begging permission to call down fire from heaven, to wipe out those mockers and their contemptible village. "Oh, but John was young," you say in extenuation. So was Christ. "He was a Jew," you say. Christ, too, was a Jew. John went all to pieces under that cutting provocation. Christ was absolute master of Himself. "Let us go to another village," He said quietly, turning away. Ah, how some of us covet that ability to resist being swept off our feet, by sudden provocation!

One day His enemies were sure they had Him inextricably netted. One of them handed Him a Roman coin—draw near, you Jews who hate

Rome; you Romans, on the alert to catch any utterance against Cæsar!—asking, "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, or not?" Whichever way He answers, they have Him now. Jew or Roman must certainly be offended. Not for an instant was Christ at a loss. Taking the coin, He held it up where all could see and, pointing to the image and superscription on it, asked, "Whose are these?" There was but one answer, of course—"Cæsar's." "Then"—who can give the keen, piercing irony of His tone—"render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and, to God, the things that are God's." How we covet the ability successfully to meet a crisis! Christ had it, always.

Day after day, the most skilful strategists laid traps for the Nazarene carpenter. Again and again, they plied Him with tricks and treacheries, with quibbles and questions, with hyperboles and hypocrisies. He was always master of Himself. Christ never hoped for self-mastery. He had it.

In our spiritual life we hope for faith—that faith which can remove mountains, which casteth out all fear of failure, of suffering, of death. "Oh," one says, "I hope to reach a place where, no matter how badly things are going, I can feel perfectly secure and go on, singing in my heart."

Again: That which is our hope, was Christ's realization. Amid all the thick adversities of His life, He kept speaking of "My joy, My peace." By His faith He was able to do all kinds of wonderful things. He had experiences which, had they been ours, would have made us question whether there were a God or no—whether He knew or cared about us, whether He was able to help? Christ never had any such questioning. On the contrary, He said, "I know that thou hearest me, always."

So, on the spiritual side of life, Christ did not hope for things such as we hope for. Our hope was His attainment. The most exalted experience in spiritual life, was Christ's—always. Was it freedom from sin? He never sinned. Was it service for others? He did nothing but serve. Was it resistance to temptation? Temptations fell, shattered lances, in His soul's tourney with evil. Was it fellowship with God? He could say, "I, and my Father, are one." Was it union with God? All His earthly life Christ had this, save for one terrible moment as He hung upon the Cross.

What, then, was Christ's greatest hope? Was there anything not included in that wondrous life and for which its Owner reached out? Yes, there surely was.

It is very hard to express. Clutton Brock, the great English thinker, says Christ, Himself, found great difficulty in expressing it. Nevertheless, we can name Christ's greatest hope. He, Himself, named it. Christ's greatest hope was the establishment, on earth, of something He called "the Kingdom of Heaven." He seems to have exhausted illustration in trying to make clear what it was He meant by it.

As He passed through a certain village, Jesus chanced to see a woman making bread. It was a charming picture that met the Master's gaze—the little thatched cottage; the vines climbing over it; the morning sun making bright lights and shadows; the woman in her coarse, dark gown, her white or red scarf folded carelessly but gracefully round her dark hair; the rough, wooden bowl, filled with dough; the brown arms, white to the elbows with flour; the body swaying with unconscious grace, as she kneaded the dough. That was all the people with Jesus saw. It was such a familiar sight that they gave it scarcely a glance. But Christ—"*The kingdom of heaven,*" He said, "*is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*"

He was walking through the city market, passing a stall where a merchant was selling

pearls, calling the attention of the passers-by to this, or that specimen of peculiar beauty. That was all the hurrying passers-by saw or heard. But Christ—"*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*"

He is on the shore near Capernaum. The boats are coming in with their night's catch. The nets are drying on the sand; the fishers are sorting the fish for the morning market into large, woven, rush baskets. That was all the others saw. But Christ—"*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.*"

"The Kingdom of Heaven." Always, the Kingdom of Heaven was in His mind and on His lips. Always, He was preaching and teaching it. What was it? What did He mean by it? Was it a general term for something good, something all desired, something to be given as a reward, for proper belief and circumspect conduct? Was it merely a phrase Christ used when He wished to inspire men—when He was talking of mysteries?

If this were all, it meant nothing at the time,

and means nothing now. But to Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven was something very real, very precious; something He was all the while seeing, realizing, thinking about, trying to make others see, but without avail.

Well, but what is it? Again music lends itself as an illustration. Are notes in themselves music? They are not: it is only when a composer takes these notes and arranges them according to his will, do they become music, sounding forth the melody already silently singing itself in his soul. Separate, unrelated notes are meaningless, if not actually discordant. They are heard by the outward ear but awaken no genuine emotions in the soul, convey no music. It is only when a composer relates them to the song he has heard in his inner spirit, that we have music. We are then given to hear something through, and beyond, these related notes. In other words, we hear music.

So Christ realized, and saw, a great spiritual order and harmony which He called "the Kingdom of Heaven." It was, as yet, invisible to earthly vision, but He knew that it could be manifested, just as potential music is expressed and heard. He passionately desired that through lives of noble purpose, selfless service, high aspirations—these spiritually-related notes, so to

speak—mankind would express the will of the Father and the Kingdom come into human consciousness. "Thy kingdom come" is the first great petition of the great Prayer which Jesus taught His disciples. That the Kingdom of Heaven might be brought into manifestation, on the earth, was Christ's greatest hope.

All of us have moments, when we share this hope. Once, in a great while, we feel and know that a right relation to others, is all that really counts—honourable, true conduct, tenderness and love. These are momentary glimpses of the supremacy of the spiritual, fleeting glimpses of "the Kingdom," which Christ saw clearly all the time. That is why He did not think of money, honour or power; the Kingdom of Heaven was so much more real, so infinitely more worth while. It lies in the souls of mankind, as Christ expressed it when He said, "*The kingdom of heaven is within you,*" and it waits to be made visible.

Did Christ expect to realize this greatest hope during His life on earth? I think not. In the first glow of His apprehension of the Kingdom He might have felt that He could get the world to see this vision, and to work it out. It was not long, however, before He realized that the world would come to it very slowly, as to all great ideals. But He started this Kingdom on the earth, and

He knew it would grow and leaven the materialism of life till, some day, the whole world would be leavened. He knew, too, that, some day, the world would see this spiritual Kingdom as the pearl of great price, and give all else, for its possession.

So, Christ went about leavening the world. Every time one accepted His teaching the Kingdom grew, the King got a new subject. One day, it was a despised leper into whom the Kingdom came as new physical health; another, it was a moral leper, into whom the Kingdom came as new spiritual health. Still another time, it was a ruler of the people, Nicodemus, into whom the Kingdom came as truth. Again: it was a beggar with his wooden alms-bowl hung about his neck, into whom the Kingdom came, as a wonderful spiritual treasure.

Up and down His native land went Jesus, winning people from worldliness, from selfishness, from the slavery of fear, worry, illness, sin, death. In all the villages and cities; along the dusty roads; on the sea, in fishing boats; in some dirt-floored cottage, in the marble-paved courts of the Temple, beside the humble table of Martha and the sumptuous table of the ruler—winning people to the spiritual life, winning subjects for the King, building, always building, the Kingdom of Heaven,

which He hoped, some day, would become the kingdom of this world, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven.

It *is* coming. It has come a long way since Christ first told of it, since He first hoped for it. Men and women, will you help to bring about its realization? Will you be true? Will you be single-minded? Will you be pure in heart? Will you be unselfish? Will you live for the good of others? Will you lift high that which is noble? Will you conquer your own sin? Will you help others to conquer theirs? Will you aid every effort having for its objective the exclusion of wrong from human life? Who, now, today, will help along to its speedy realization, Christ's greatest hope?

V

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST GRIEF?

IS there not a distinction, subtle but real, between sorrow and grief? Sorrow is peculiarly personal. We sorrow for our own hurt or loss or pain. Grief is more impersonal. We grieve over the hurt, or loss, or pain of others. Sorrow is one note, only, in the oratorio of life. Grief is the all-pervading theme, to which every note contributes.

We are not seeking to discover what was the greatest sorrow of Christ. We are seeking something much deeper and stronger—His greatest grief.

One day, there came to Him a young man whom, the Bible says, Christ loved the moment He saw him. He was young, handsome, rich. You remember the scene. It is replete with some sharp contrasts—the rich and the poor, face to face; the soft linen of the aristocrat's robe brushing against the coarse homespun of the Man of Nazareth; the tender palm of the pampered stretched out to the calloused palm of the work-

man; the man from marble palace and the man from village cottage; the man from rustling silken couches and the man who had not where to lay His head. The young aristocrat steps out of the past before us in whitest linen, with jewels gleaming in his girdle and in the buckles of his red sandals, his hair fragrant with perfume, his skin glowing from the perfumed bath; and,—best of all—impelled to Christ by real spiritual aspiration. Fine young manhood seeking eternal life. Do you wonder Christ loved him?

But over that handsome face a darkening expression creeps, darkening it as a cloud does the sunlight. The smooth forehead is creased with a frown. The head, hitherto held erect, falls forward as the eyes seek the ground. He turns away from Christ and goes silently back to his marble palace, his silken tapestries, his beautiful gardens. Material wealth met spiritual wealth that day, and material wealth triumphed. There was something more than mere sorrow in Christ's soul as He saw the young man go. The Master's soul was filled with grief.

Another day, Christ entered a crowded synagogue. Through the narrow windows, far up near the roof, rays of light stabbed the darkness, showing the men squatting tailor-fashion on the floor. Behind the latticed screen, the women, with dark

eyes, watching eagerly. In that dimness and crowd, far back where he would not be noticed, was a man with a withered hand. Did he know Christ was to be there? Had a faint hope sent him there? What chance had he in that crowd? Was it not the Sabbath, and was it not unlawful to heal on that day? Yet there he was, his poor, withered, twisted hand hidden beneath his tattered gown.

Christ saw him—saw *him*—in all that gathered crowd. Christ called him forward. "*And they watched him whether he would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him.*"

Was not Christ fine? He knew their narrow religious law about the Sabbath. He knew what they were thinking, what they contemplated doing. He did not hesitate. "*He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or evil? to save life or to kill?*" and He healed the man then and there. This splendid broadness and bravery of Jesus must challenge the admiration of every true soul. What feeling welled up in Christ's soul as He saw the hostile, critical faces around Him? The Bible says, "He was grieved at the hardness of their hearts."

We, too, have come face to face, at times, with narrow views which threatened some fine opportunity or endeavour. We have been righteously

indignant, more than indignant, grieved, that any could be so small as to allow their stubborn and limited viewpoint to prevent a real good. Our chief feeling has been one of humiliation and grief, at such a hindrance to oncoming blessing. Such was the grief in Christ's heart, in that day long ago, but in a degree immeasurably greater than ours. Yet this grief was not His greatest.

One day, Christ gave the people one of His most vital truths—"*Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you.*" The words mystified His hearers. They took them literally. Some smiled, some sneered, some shook their heads significantly; He must be mad, this man from Nazareth. Christ saw and understood it all. He saw them turn away, no more to follow Him. Who can express the depth of saddened reproof contained in His question to His immediate disciples—"Will ye, also, go away?" Can you not understand the deep grief in Christ's heart as He saw the precious truth He gave fall, and lie neglected on the surface of people's lives? There is almost nothing that so grieves a great and true teacher as the utter failure of his hearers to understand him. Raise that grief to its highest power, and one comes to some faint conception of the grief of Christ, the wondrous "teacher come from God," when He poured

out the deep, vital truths of the spiritual life, and poured them out—in vain.

Did Christ experience His greatest grief when He wept over Jerusalem? History has fixed that scene forever—the road winding over the knoll from Bethany; the long line of pilgrims in varicoloured garments, fading away in the distance; in the foreground, Christ, on the ass's colt. Beyond, the great city, its houses, like fallen leaves around a tree, clustering about the magnificent Temple, which towers above them, its golden roof shining in the afternoon sunlight, like an oriflamme of glory. Always, that view of Jerusalem, rising white and beautiful out of the dark valley of the Kedron—like a white angel from a tomb—caused the people to shout exultantly. Amid all the shouting, Christ was virtually silent. His bosom heaved with rending sobs and broken utterance, more to Himself than to others, He said,—"How oft would I have gathered thee, as a hen her chickens, and ye would not." That was not sorrow. That was deep, heartfelt grief, for the wonderful city shutting out the divine life which had come sweeping up to it, as the sea to the shore. Here and there, along the centuries, there stand the ruins of other great cities which emulated Jerusalem's refusal. Was what Christ felt over Jerusalem His greatest grief?

It is one of the two recorded occasions of Christ's weeping. The other was at the tomb of Lazarus. The little vine-covered cottage at Bethany was the only home Christ had during His public life. When very weary, sorely troubled by the cruel misunderstanding and bitter hostility of the rulers, He would go to Bethany for a few hours or days of rest. There, in the cool olive grove, or amid the vines purpling with grapes, He would walk or sit with the three He loved—Martha, Mary and Lazarus. And Lazarus had died. The little circle was broken. I think Christ must have been keenly moved by the sight of the silent little house, the stricken sisters. As the flood of memories swept over Him, Jesus wept—just as some of us have wept over the graves of our loved ones. His feeling was so pronounced that the bystanders said, " See how he loved him." Was that Christ's greatest grief?

Surely not. There were things which, more than any such, filled Him with deepest grief—the betrayal by Judas, for instance. Think of it. Judas had been honoured by close fellowship with Christ for three years. He had heard some most wonderful things from the lips of the Master—things the crowd never heard. He had been given private personal explanations of what, to outsiders, remained mysteries. He had been shown Christ's

sacred purpose and plans. Then—to have such an one turn traitor; to have him sell his Lord like a slave; to bring his Master's foes to the secret retiring place and there to give Him the kiss which was to be the sign for seizure by the soldiers—tell me, you who have had similar betrayals in home and business and in social life—tell me, do you not know something of the feeling which filled Christ's soul? It was not anger. It was not revenge. It was not hate. It was a shocking, astonished grief. Was it, think you, Christ's greatest grief?

No. The grief Peter's denial caused Christ was greater. Peter was far dearer to Christ than was Judas. Peter, blunt, rough, impetuous, nevertheless loving and lovable Peter, really loved Christ and showed that he did. He had cheered and comforted Christ as, perhaps, no other disciple had, by his open, spontaneous testimony, "*Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.*" Peter was Christ's choice for the foundation of His Church. Peter had drawn the first sword ever unsheathed for Christ—but, alas, not the last. Peter had loudly sworn he would never desert Christ. Peter had piled up the loudest professions of love and loyalty for Christ, and then—all had fallen like a house of cards. How did Christ feel that awful night in the courtyard of the High

Priest's palace, where, as He passed to trial, He saw Peter warming himself by the fire, and denying, with oaths and cursings, he had ever known Him? As Christ turned and looked at Peter that night, what grief of soul must have been His. Denied publicly by—Peter—*Peter*. Can one think of any greater grief than to be denied by one he loves, one who has shared one's intimacy for years? I think that same kind of grief, though not so great as Christ's, was what killed Cæsar. Not the daggers of his assailants, but the fact that he saw Brutus among them.

And yet, Christ's grief at Peter's denial of Him was surpassed, I am sure, by that He experienced when those who fled and left Him alone at His crisis, included John—John, the specially beloved disciple; John, who had lain on Christ's bosom at the Last Supper. But even *that* was not Christ's greatest grief.

The greatest grief of Christ—what was it? Can we not take all these varied occurrences and discover what, in each, was the core of the grief? At what did He grieve when the rich young man turned away, refusing the heavenly for the earthly; when the rulers in the synagogue placed the traditional religious law above the actual helping of human need; when the people sneered at, and refused to follow, His teaching of divine

truth? At what did Christ grieve, at the grave of Lazarus; when Judas betrayed Him, when Peter denied Him?

Always the grief of Christ was caused by the same thing—the rejection of spiritual reality. Time and again, framed differently in different instances, that wonderful other life—the eternal spiritual reality—was set in the place of choice with the purely earthly life. People saw it, felt it, knew it, and—spurned it.

We have seen that Christ's greatest hope was for the reign on earth of the spiritual—He called it "the Kingdom of Heaven." The greatest grief of Christ was to see people reject the Kingdom. It broke His heart to see peace, power, purity, love, and the mastery of fear, worry, care, illness and death—things people were starving for, seeking everywhere—come right up to men and women, and they, for one reason or another, shutting them out. He pictured this in His parable of the great supper to which people were invited and they all with one accord excused and would not come. *That* was Christ's greatest grief—the spiritual refusal of people. *That*—not the nails, the spear, the Cross—really crucified Him.

Some of us have known—in incomparably lesser degree, of course—what that grief of rejection is. We have let our truest self go out to some one in

need, to some worthy cause. We had no thought, other than to help. We saw clearly the need; but we were met with indifference, with misunderstanding, with ridicule, with anger. And we were smitten with great grief, not for ourselves, but for the hurt our friend, or the cause, did themselves. We saw the trouble, the anxiety, the suffering, the loss, the ruin, keep rolling up when all could have been avoided. That is what grieved us—the rejection of the offered different life. That—in infinitely greater degree because of what He was, what He offered, and the eternal consequences involved—was the greatest grief of Christ.

May I venture to illustrate the greatest grief of Christ by something very personal and sacred? Many a wife has had husband, or son, repulse her every effort to help him. He thinks her presumptuous, egotistic, dictatorial. He regards her action as an infringement of his independence, while, all the time, no such feelings have any place in her heart. She loves her dear one and that love, alone, prompts her offered help, as the fulness of a spring sends little streams of pure life-saving water, trickling over the dry ground. Thoughtlessly, often; often with intentional cutting rebuff, these overtures of love and help are thrown back, stabbing love to the heart. It is not sorrow a woman feels at such time; it is not hate; it is

not anger; it is heart-breaking grief; and, not for herself, but for her dear one. She sees clearly what he is doing, how suicidal it all is, how he will come to see it, when too late, even if he never admits it to another.

Yes; that is the greatest grief any one can know—selfless love repulsed. That is what Christ felt, as no other soul ever felt it. You know what such an agony was for you. Think what it was for Christ. *That* was Christ's greatest grief.

Christ was in a class by Himself—the one supreme, divine soul among men. His was a love, far surpassing the love of woman. His was a vision, that saw down the ages, without a cloud upon its horizon. His was a mission, the most vital and eternal in its effect, that the world will ever know. His was a method, unique in its self-surrender, its untiring application, its endless service, its perpetual sacrifice. His was the gift of unsearchable riches.

Being all this, when Christ came to mankind what happened? "*He came unto his own and his own received him not.*" Nazareth was the town of His boyhood and early manhood. He came to Nazareth with His gift of eternal life and the townsfolk hurried Him to a precipice, to hurl Him to destruction. He had toiled for years to feed and house His younger brothers. They

were His own. When He offered them His gift of eternal life, they jeered Him and laughed in His face. They rejected His pretensions and spurred Him to a premature proclamation of His claims. He offered the people along the roads, in the little towns by the sea, in the great cities, His Bread of Life. They refused it, clamouring for miracles, instead. He tried to teach them eternal truths, but had to sadly admit they followed Him 'for the loaves and fishes." He sought to inspire the souls of His immediate disciples, to awaken spiritual aspirations in them, but had to say, "*Ye call me, Lord, Lord, but do not the things which I say.*"

So, day after day, from all sides, Christ's greatest grief came to Him. It rolled in like the mounting tide, rising steadily upon the shore. Day by day, the vane of His life swung toward Gethsemane. When, finally, He agonized there, under the olive trees, alone at night, that poignant trial was not His greatest grief. What crushed Him, then, was only the accumulated force of His life's great grief, breaking in one great wave upon one awful hour.

Christ's greatest grief was the deep, heaving, fathomless disappointment of seeing men turn away from the loving approach of God. That was not sorrow—sorrow has tears, only. That

was grief—grief has drops of blood. Like the wail of the wind in the casement when the storm is raging, comes that infinitely tender echo of the great grief of our Saviour,—"*How oft would I . . . and ye would not.*"

We have no surer revelation of character than grief. The things that cause one grief are the ultimate tests of what he is. It shows what one is thinking; what one yearns for; what one is really siding with. The truest patriot is not always he who fights or dies for his country, but he who truly grieves over her faults. The truest social reformer is not always the agitator—the ranter—but he who has a deep heartfelt grief over social injustices. Examine that which makes him grieve, and you have the revelation of what a man really is, in the deep, essential avenues of his being.

Thus, when we see Christ grieving over men's rejection of the spiritual life, we have in that grief the surest revelation of His own spiritual life, of His love for mankind, of His appraisement of the soul of each. Men do not grieve over what has no value for them, what is not important, what is not dear.

Christ did not grieve because He was rejected. He grieved because the Kingdom of God, embodied in Him, was rejected. Christ did not

grieve because men would not follow *Him,* but because men would not follow the life of which He was the revealer. Christ did not grieve because men sent *Him* to the Cross. He grieved because men crucified their own spiritual possibilities.

Christ's greatest grief shows His greatest unselfishness, His greatest love, His greatest solicitude for mankind. It is as when a woman says to her dearest one: "I grieve, not for myself, but for you. It breaks my heart to see you push your best self away, to see you turn from your noblest, divinest instinct, to your low and fleshly self."

How Christ showed this as He went along *Via Dolorosa*—along which, all the centuries, many loving, self-forgetful souls have followed, bearing His Cross. Turning to the women who, weeping, followed Him, He said,—"*Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*" His was not grief for Himself but for those who, killing Him, were really killing themselves.

It is said that, when the old Gallic chieftain heard the story of Christ's suffering and death for the first time, he sprang to his feet, waving his mighty sword in the air. With the ringing voice, which had so often inspired his men and

brought dismay to his foes, he cried: "Why was I not there, with my Gauls?"

So, doubtless, we have felt many times. Ah, but we *are* there. Every time the holy impulse touches us, we are there. Every time a divine emotion moves our inner self, we are there. Every time the call comes to be holy, to give up sin, to let self go, to live for righteousness, to strive to be like Christ, to line up with the Church He founded and loved, to lift our fellow-men nearer heaven—the spiritual rolls up to us as it did when, in Christ's Person upon the earth, it came to men for their acceptance, or refusal.

So it came—so it comes, still. Will you know it, feel it, and turn away? Or will you reject the holiest? Will you spurn the Christ?

Then, believe me, *you* add another tear to those already on His cheeks; *you* add another sob to that breaking heart. *You* make the greatest grief of the great Son of God, still greater as it continues through the ages.

VI

WHAT WAS CHRIST'S GREATEST VICTORY?

IS it not true that great visible victories are often simply the outward expression of victories first won, alone and unseen? A military commander sits in his tent at midnight, with war-maps spread out before him, planning, by lantern-light, the coming battle. Every power of mind and soul is enlisted to make the winning of that battle sure. The victory which on the morrow will be heralded far and wide, is, in reality, being won in those lonely hours of darkness.

An architect studies the nature of the soil, upon which he is to build, the strength of the materials he proposes to use, the purposes of the building he is to design. Then he draws his plans. Later, men see the towering office-building in the heart of a great city, or a magnificent library, or the span of a marvellous bridge. Every obstacle had been met and conquered in the brain of the architect ere any construction had begun.

The great victories of our lives are not their

outward expression, as we often and hastily think; they are the inner triumphs which precede the outer. When we come to realize this, we know we must go behind Christ's recorded victories in order to find His greatest victory of them all.

On that day when the woman taken in adultery was brought before Jesus, He won a great victory over Hebrew legalism, in which He had been reared as strictly as the Jewish rulers. The woman's guilt is admitted. She has no excuse to offer as she crouches before Him, the trembling centre of a curious, hostile crowd. No defense was possible, and there was no sympathy in any heart but His. The woman's accusers quote the undeniable law: "*Moses commanded such should be stoned. What sayest thou?*" The crowd surges forward to hear His answer, their sneering faces intent, their black eyes focussed on Him, ready to flame into fury at any belittling of Moses. The rulers smiling craftily, as they await His reply. Will He contradict the law of His people or will He uphold the law, and deny help to the needy? He cannot escape; they have Him, either way.

Christ does not answer. He bends over and writes with His finger in the dust—the only record we have of any writing by Christ. The first careless foot, a whiff of air, brushed it away for-

ever. Had it but petrified—think what it would have been worth, today; the supreme place it would hold among the world's treasures—the autograph of Christ! What did He write? We shall never know. I wonder if His intent was not so much to write anything as, with a beautiful thoughtfulness, to divert the gaze of those bitterly burning eyes from the poor wretch before Him?

But His enemies cared nothing for that. What they sought was His entrapment. They press Him and—He answered: "*Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone,*" He says quietly, and resumes His writing.

That was all. Was it not enough? The sneers give place to glances of baffled hate. He accuses no one. He does not abrogate the Mosaic law. He does not refuse needed help. But they are as powerless as though stricken with paralysis. She—she was a sinner; but who of them could be executioner, if sinlessness be the qualification? The arms, uplifted to throw stones, drop. These men had been pointing accusing fingers at her—conscience points, now, the accusing finger at each of *them.* Silently they slink away. Truly, that was one of the outstanding victories of Jesus. But was it His greatest?

Another great victory gained by Christ was

when He was proffered a sceptre, and refused it; when He was offered a crown, and rejected it; when He was led to the very foot of a possible throne, and declined it. But that was not His greatest victory.

Nor was Gethsemane, when He accepted His Cross, and in so doing, overcame the instinct, strongest of all instincts, to escape suffering and death.

Heroic, superb, as these were, they were but the fruit of His greatest victory. They derive from the inner triumph first gained in His own soul, and without which they never would have been. To find that, we must get back of them, and enter, if it be possible, the inner life of Christ. Can we do that?

I think we can. Christ was a Hebrew. At the time He lived there was one supreme and all-absorbing hope in the national heart—the coming Messiah. And there was, also, a fixed and rigid conception of Him. The rulers had made a life study of every prophetic utterance. They had built up a mountainous mass of theory and tradition. This had become instilled into the Hebrew people, till the national feeling about the Messiah was formed and petrified.

The Messiah was to be a king like Cæsar, but incomparably more splendid, more powerful. He

was to subdue and subject to the Jews all earthly kingdoms. The Jews were to rule these subject nations. Plenty and riches were to be the portion of every Hebrew.

So every son of Israel thought. So, it would seem, Christ thought, for He, in common with all Hebrew boys, was so taught from infancy. As He grew older, there were, doubtless, inner waverings and questionings in His mind about this, from time to time. Do not such always precede the birth of every new revelation of truth? But not till later—scholars tell us it was at the time of His baptism—did Christ fully realize that He was the Messiah, for whom all were waiting. He went down into the water a peasant; He came up out of the water, a conscious King. He went down into the water, a convert of John; He came up out of the water, the divine Lord of John. He went down into the water, with a partial realization of His mission; He came up out of the water, with a clear, divine purpose. He went down into the water, with a knowledge of the kind of Messiah expected; He came up out of the water, with a revelation of the kind of Messiah God expected Him to be.

How significant it is, that the Spirit drove Him, at once, into the wilderness, to meet temptation. There, alone, were unfolded to Him, in detail, the

temporal expectations. There, in solitude, were unrolled before Him, all the worldly glories. There, He was inwardly urged to meet all these expectations, to realize all these possibilities.

The two utterly distinct, antithetical conceptions of the Messiah met—the nation's conception, fixed, mighty, centuries old; the divine conception, which stood in direct antagonism to the national ideal. One was material, the other, spiritual; one was temporal, the other, eternal; one was clothed in pomp, splendour, earthly glory, the other, in humility, sacrifice, service, suffering. One conception carried long deferred vengeance on those who had enslaved the Hebrew people; the other, rising far above all Hebrew solitariness, radiated a holy love for all mankind. There, on the lonely mount of temptation, these two antithetical conceptions of the most vital thing in the world's history collided in the soul of Christ. A personal inner consciousness of the divine will, a personal spiritual conviction, collided with the open, regnant centuries-old, popular expectation. Then the struggle came—should He be the Messiah expected of Israel, or the Messiah God willed?

It was just there, as it seems to me, that Christ's greatest victory was won. He determined to realize the divine plan, and not the

human expectation. He turned away from the established conviction in the full consciousness of what that rejection would mean for Him. He determined for God's purpose.

Do we not stand, many times, exactly where Christ, at that moment, stood? Of course, the issue with us is in no degree comparable with Christ's. But it is the same in implication and kind.

To each of us, come times when we face a new future, be it what it may. We meet that day, understanding fairly definitely the world's estimate of things, of people, generally. In one way or another, we realize how people have to live in order to get along. Little by little—we scarcely can tell how or when—we come to feel that human life insists upon a certain type of man or woman. We feel one has to make some moral compromises, to form some not altogether proper alliances; one has to wink at a good many shady things. One may not want to do all, or any, of this. He is sorry he must. But, he has to look out for the interests of others, some very dear to him. Every one of us collides, sooner or later, with a fixed and old, a strong and unyielding, universal conviction about life, just as Christ collided with such a conviction about the Messiahship. Really, the two things are one.

Then, for each of us, as for Him, the battle begins. We ask the same questions he asked—"What shall I do? Shall I be what I am expected to be or what I feel I should be? Shall I take the path the world says I must, or take the right path? Shall I recognize the strong conventional requirements or shall I ignore them? Shall I have my own spiritual conviction or adopt the already formed material conviction? Shall it be the spectacular, the immediate, the mercenary success; or the deep hidden sweet spiritual success? Shall I live for self, or for God?"

It is a crucial moment when these two ideals meet in any one's soul. But such a moment comes to all—the moment when soul meets body, when right meets practicality, when ideal meets real, when self meets God.

Such a moment came to Moses. See him in all the incomparable splendour of Egypt's royalty. Slaves wait the merest expression on his face. Armies await his word of command. The measureless wealth of the centuries is in his hands. The throne of the Pharaohs invites him. The old grey temples with their wondrous mysteries welcome him, as their chief priest.

All these combined to make a mighty imperative demand from the outside, telling Moses what he was expected to be, what he must do, what,

alone, would be acceptable. See him out in the Midian desert, where the bush is lit with celestial fire. He stands alone and poor, barefoot on the dry, hot sand, listening to the divine call, telling him what he was to be, what he was to do, where he was to go. That was the inward demand of God.

Thus they met in Moses—the outward and the inward. The same old struggle, you see, between the call of God in a man's soul, and the call of the world. When Moses obeyed the call of God, instead of the call of Egypt, he had his greatest victory. All subsequent victories—victory over the ignorance and obstinacy of the people in the desert, over the hostile forces along the way, over the natural obstacles of the long journey—these were all the outcome of that one great victory, when the greatest of the Hebrews yielded himself, once for all, to God.

Leap over many centuries to Paul. We know that two calls collided in the soul of the greatest of the apostles, and what they were. One was the call of the world to be the successor of Gamaliel, to be a famous rabbi, to be the President of the Sanhedrin, *i. e.,* President of the Jewish state. The other, was the call of Christ to follow Him, to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, with all that meant for the opening of the Western world to Chris-

tianity; all it meant of practising self-mastery, for Paul was naturally proud, ambitious.

I think it was easier for Moses to give up Egypt for God, than it was for Paul to give up Pharisaism for Christ. But Paul did just that. Paul's life was starred with many brilliant victories. One was when he defeated his former colleagues in debate, in Jerusalem. It was a wonderful victory to meet the Greek philosophers on Mars' Hill, and make them listen to the Christian message. It was a wonderful victory he won in the royal court at Cæsarea before Felix, Agrippa, and the beautiful but wicked Bernice. It was wonderful to conquer even Rome for Christ. The great stone column which, in that day, bore the statue of the Roman Emperor, still stands, but on it, now, is the statue of St. Paul.

But the greatest victory in Paul's life was not in Jerusalem or Athens, not in Cæsarea or Rome, or in Cyprus, where he put to shame Elymas, the sorcerer. Paul's greatest victory was on the white, limestone road near Damascus, at blazing midday, when he heard Christ's call and answered—letting the former self-planned career go utterly—"*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*"

If I have succeeded, in any way, in doing what it was in my heart to do, there should stand out

very sharply, in our thought, these three things—the greatest battle anyone can know, is the battle between what he is told by the world to be, must be, and what something, deep down in his own soul—I call it God—tells him he *should* be. The greatest defeat anyone can know, is the surrender of what God tells him he ought to be, to what the world tells him he *must* be. The greatest victory any one can have, is when he decides to be what God tells him to be, not what the world insists he shall be.

No matter what else a man fights, no battle has at stake such issues as this. No matter what else a man loses, he can lose nothing so far-reaching in its importance as this battle. "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" No matter what victory a man may win, there is no victory so great as this—the victory of the spiritual call of God, over the material call of the world.

Was not this Christ's greatest victory? Is it not this, which Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem enframes? In the golden days of the Roman Empire, when a general returned victorious, he was given a public triumph. Along the Appian Way to the Forum would sweep the victorious army, carrying, in regal splendour, the conquering leader. Behind him, in chains, were

led those whom he had defeated, yet spared in order that they might grace his triumph.

So, on that first Palm Sunday, Christ, who had conquered the bitter foes warring against His spiritual safety, rode in triumph. In His train were no ruined lives, no broken hearts, no blasted hopes; rather a countless throng of exultantly acclaiming people.

As they come down the slope of Olivet, we seem to see them, even now. Who is that man with the wondrously beautiful eyes, all alight with love? He is the man who was born blind, shouting praises for the blessed wonder-worker who had given him his sight.

Who is that woman with a fine, manly lad by her side, both of them with radiant faces, waving palms above their heads and crying, "*Hosanna, Hosanna*"? She is the widow of Nain, whose son Jesus raised from the dead.

Who is that man whose voice is ringing out, above all others, just as it used to do in the streets, while people fled from him in fear—"Unclean, unclean." He is a man—once a leper, whom Christ healed. Today—how he shouts! We can hear him over the hill-tops of twenty centuries—"*Hosanna, Hosanna.*"

And she with the beautiful, pure face—a face lit exultantly as she waves her palm? She is

known as the woman who was once a sinner, but to whom Christ had given renewed womanhood. See her glowing face as it is turned towards her Saviour, on this historic afternoon.

I think I can see Martha and Mary in that company, their faces bright with love; and I am sure that is Lazarus—the man with the strange look in his eyes—eyes which had seen so much of that we want to see.

There is the ruler, whose little girl was put again in his arms by Jesus, after all had said she was dead. Do you wonder that he and his little girl, and all the others, plucked palms and waved them for Christ the while they shouted, "*Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord*"?

Can you join this victorious throng? Have you any experience of the forgiveness of God in Christ? Have you any realization of the cleansing power of Jesus? Are you living in a new world, because Christ has made it new for you? Has the fear of death been taken away by Him? Do you feel that those precious ones who left you some time ago are still yours, still living, and that your meeting them again, one day, is gloriously sure? Are you calm in your inner self, because enfolded in God's healing, saving power?

Then, come; bring your palm. Wave it over

Christ, the victor, as the people did so long ago. For all this is the fruit of Christ's greatest victory. As their cry echoes down the centuries, shout with them—"*Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!*"

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